Joint Ventures
Implement the 1998 Plan Update

G.R. Zahm, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Considered by many to be the most successful international conservation initiative in existence, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan lays out a strategy to restore continental waterfowl populations to levels recorded in the 1970s by protecting, restoring, and enhancing the habitats waterfowl depend upon.

The success of the Plan lies in the hands of its public-private partnerships, called joint ventures. Since the inception of the Plan in 1986, partners have invested more than US$1.5 billion to conserve more than 5 million acres of wetlands and associated uplands. Partners' efforts combined with recent years of excellent climatic conditions on waterfowl breeding grounds have resulted in many waterfowl populations being at or above Plan goals. Even though it has been predicted that the largest fall flight on record would occur in 1999, more work needs to be done.

Partners face new challenges in maintaining populations and helping those that have not yet fully recovered. The *1998 Update to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan: Expanding the Vision* details current and future challenges and offers three visions to guide partners as they take waterfowl conservation into the next century.

Plan partners enhance the capability of landscapes to support waterfowl and other wetland-associated species by ensuring that Plan implementation is guided by biologically based planning, which in turn is refined through ongoing evaluation.

Plan partners define the landscape conditions needed to sustain waterfowl and benefit other wetland-associated species, and participate in the development of conservation, economic, management, and social policies and programs that most affect the ecological health of these landscapes.

Plan partners collaborate with other conservation efforts, particularly migratory bird initiatives, and reach out to other sectors and communities to forge broader alliances in a collective search for sustainable uses of landscapes.

In this supplement to the Winter 1999/2000 issue of *Waterfowl 2000*, joint venture coordinators reveal actions being taken by partners to manifest the Plan's visions. As they have since its inception in 1986, partners will continue to determine the Plan's success... The future looks bright!

The Atlantic Coast Joint Venture

Tom Ramsey

Atlantic Coast Joint Venture partners will conserve habitat for all birds across the Joint Venture's expansive landscape. (Prothonotary warbler pictured.).

On May 26, 1988, a group representing 13 states, 3 conservation organizations, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service convened its first organizational meeting as the Atlantic Coast Joint Venture. The fledgling partnership accepted the responsibility of delivering the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's objectives for the Middle-Upper Atlantic Coast, which spanned coastal areas from Maine to South Carolina.

The term "joint venture" was new then. The value and stability of partnerships having so many varied interests were largely untested. It is doubtful that those in attendance at that first meeting could have envisioned the staggering accomplishments that they would achieve for wetland and waterfowl conservation in just over 10 years.

It is doubtful that those in attendance at that first meeting could have envisioned the staggering accomplishments that they would achieve.

The original Joint Venture goal was to "...protect and manage priority wetland habitats for migration, wintering, and production of waterfowl, with special consideration to black ducks; and to benefit other wildlife in the joint venture area." Over the ensuing decade, the Joint Venture expanded both its geographic borders and its conservation goals.

The current Joint Venture boundary reflects the additions of West Virginia, Georgia, and Florida, plus the assimilation of portions of the former Lower Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Basin Joint Venture. While the boundary no longer portrays the relatively narrow biological focus of the 1986 Plan, it is indicative of the broad array of partners that have combined resources under the Joint Venture's banner. The now 17-state region also possesses an incredible mosaic of habitats, including boreal forest, barrier islands and bays, the Appalachian mountains and piedmont, vast estuarine complexes, inland swamps, and subtropical lowlands.

Recognizing the value of these habitats to migratory birds other than waterfowl, the Joint Venture recently completed its most significant and exciting expansion to date. It was not a geographic expansion—it was an expansion of the Joint Venture's vision for the future of migratory bird conservation. On March 26, 1999, the Joint Venture Management Board voted unanimously to embrace the concept of an integrated approach to habitat and migratory bird conservation. Partners will conserve habitat for all birds across the Joint Venture's expansive landscape. Within the last 6 months, the Management Board has taken the following actions:

- Voted to invite representatives of the other major migratory bird initiatives to join both the Management Board and the Technical Committee;
- Became a participant in the Partners in Flight's Northeast and Southeast Working Groups and in the North Atlantic and South Atlantic Shorebird Habitat Working Groups, and became a member of the North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan Advisory Committee;
- Sponsored a workshop to kick off the five-state South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative, which will conserve migratory bird habitat along the coastal plain from southeast Virginia to Northern Florida; and
- Sent a letter in support of the wildlife conservation provisions of the proposed Conservation and Reinvestment Act to all congressional representatives in the 17-state Joint Venture region.

The level of excitement remains high among Joint Venture partners. The coming year will see new initiatives, increased cooperation, and more progress toward the vision of a fully integrated approach to bird conservation.

Joseph McCauley, Joint Venture Coordinator

The Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture

Karen Hollingsworth for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Up to 60 percent of the continental population of northern pintails winter in the Central Valley of California.

During the winter, wetlands and agricultural lands in California's Central Valley support the largest single concentration of waterfowl in North America—about 3 to 4 million birds. This represents 60 percent of all waterfowl wintering in the Pacific Flyway (excluding sea ducks) and approximately 20 percent of all waterfowl wintering in North America.

Historically, wetlands spread across nearly 4 million acres of the valley. Today, about 300,000 acres remain. These remnant wetlands comprise one of the most important wintering habitats in North America. In 1990, Central Valley Habitat Joint Venture partners adopted an implementation plan to halt and reverse wetland losses by protecting, enhancing, and restoring wetlands, securing water and power supplies for wetland management, and enhancing agricultural lands important to waterfowl.

These remnant wetlands comprise one of the most important wintering habitats in North America.

The magnitude of the work and the cost involved demanded prudent decisions about where, when, and how dollars would be spent. The Joint Venture used a bioenergetics model as its central planning tool to provide a biologically sound basis for accomplishing conservation objectives. Using this approach, the total energy requirements of projected waterfowl populations in the Central Valley were estimated and acreage objectives were established for wetland habitat and agricultural land.

Habitat conditions have improved in most of the valley's nine drainage basins, and waterfowl populations also have improved, but more work needs to be done. The Joint Venture's keystone species, the northern pintail, is still below population goals, and a few of the valley's basins have yet to see habitat work begin.

During the past year, the Joint Venture Management Board and Technical Committee have begun the process of updating the Joint Venture's implementation plan to include information previously not considered, such as urban expansion and agro-economics. Furthermore, the Management Board hired a Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator in the spring of 1999 to work closely with the Technical Committee to refine the plan's biological foundation. Through a variety of investigations, information gaps in the original bioenergetics model will be addressed and new information will be incorporated.

On a landscape level, the Joint Venture partners are working closely with representatives from other migratory bird initiatives, such as the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and Partners in Flight, and with the California Riparian Joint Venture and Point Reyes Bird Observatory. In working together on the various management boards and technical committees, the exchange of expertise results in projects that involve a variety of habitats benefitting a variety of wildlife. The diversity of these partnerships also helps to leverage the limited dollars available for conservation work.

This new era of integrated migratory bird conservation promises to bring exciting challenges and rewards as we continue to refine our biological foundation, move to conserving multiple habitats across the landscape, and expand our partnerships to include new interests.

Bob Shaffer, Joint Venture Coordinator
Ruth Ostroff, Director of Communications
Mike Eichholz, Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator

The Eastern Habitat Joint Venture

Randy Milton, Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources

The salt marsh and eel grass beds of Musquodoboit Harbour, Outer Estuary, Nova Scotia, winter in excess of 8,000 Canada geese and 3,000 black ducks, and provide staging and stopover habitat for thousands more.

In November, the Eastern Habitat Joint Venture celebrated its 10th anniversary as the eastern Canada implementation arm of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The Joint Venture consists of the six eastern Canada provinces, has 65 percent of the country's population, and covers approximately 3,175,515 square kilometers.

As part of the Joint Venture's 15-year strategy, partners have developed implementation plans to be delivered over 5-year intervals. The Joint Venture is currently entering its third planning phase of the 15-year strategy. This phase will incorporate the three visions of the 1998 Plan update.

To strengthen the biological foundation of work within the Joint Venture, Plan implementation will be guided by sound biologically based principals. This will be accomplished by defining concise and measurable management objectives that will be evaluated to determine their effectiveness in reaching management goals.

Evaluation projects include a study to determine the affects of impoundment construction on wildlife habitat, an evaluation of the value of a small marsh program to waterfowl and other wildlife, and the impacts of forestry practices on breeding waterfowl.

The landscape approach needed to sustain waterfowl and other wetland associated species will also be addressed. The Joint Venture will incorporate on-the-ground wildlife management practices with social, cultural, and economics factors, and will rely heavily on community support for these activities to be successful.

The Joint Venture has undertaken several initiatives with regard to implementing the landscape approach to conservation, including studies to examine community and social values toward wetland conservation and management; development of programs aimed at the agricultural community such as riparian protection, soil conservation, and alternate watering; and expansion of communications and education products and programs.

Expanding the Joint Venture's partnerships is critical. Partnership expansion will be particularly important as the North American Bird Conservation Initiative develops. Delivering Joint Venture programs under the guidance of the 1998 Plan update is a key element in planning activities.

Broadening partnerships will be directed toward traditional and non-traditional partners and will include other Joint Ventures, government and non-government organizations, aboriginal groups, and private individuals at the regional, national, and international level.

The incorporation of the update's visions into the Joint Venture strategy has already begun. It is fundamental to securing migratory bird and wetland and associated upland habitat in eastern Canada and across the continent.

Reg Melanson, Joint Venture Coordinator

The Gulf Coast Joint Venture

Coastal marshes and agricultural lands—the two major landscapes of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture important to waterfowl and other migratory birds. (Little blue heron, immature, pictured).

Kevin Hollingsworth, U.S. fish and Wildlife Service

The Gulf Coast Joint Venture Management Board is prepared, and, indeed, has taken actions to meet the challenges of the 1998 update to the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan*: strengthen the Plan's biological foundation, continue to move toward landscape conservation, and broaden partnerships.

In 1998, the Joint Venture established a full-time biological team leader position to guide and coordinate efforts to improve and expand the biological planning, implementation, and monitoring and assessment of its waterfowl and wetland conservation activities. The Management Board recognized that a deliberate effort to review and improve the biological foundation of the Joint Venture's habitat conservation strategies would be vital to a strong, evolving joint venture.

The Joint Venture is updating the implementation plans of its six initiative areas. Each plan will include explicitly stated, testable assumptions; derivations of population objectives with species-specific migration chronologies; and energetic modeling of some habitat objectives. These plans will also be linked to the Joint Venture's evaluation plan. A reorganized evaluation team, chaired by the biological team leader, has identified high-priority evaluation issues as part of the Joint Venture's adaptive management framework.

Biological planning is the genesis of the Joint Venture's landscape approach to Plan delivery.

Biological planning is the genesis of the Joint Venture's landscape approach to Plan delivery. Work done on the Joint Venture's coastal plain, a working landscape devoted to rice production that is of significant importance to wintering waterfowl, provides an example. Objectives for flooded agricultural habitat have been determined by an energetics model, and projects are being delivered that are beneficial or neutral with respect to use of the land for agriculture.

Preliminary investigations are underway to determine the proportion of the modeled habitat need that is minimally provided by normal agricultural practices and rainfall. The difference between what is minimally provided and the modeled need will be used to direct resources to those areas of the landscape that are farthest from meeting objectives. Additionally, habitat objectives for shorebirds will complement the Joint Venture's conservation efforts on the agricultural landscape.

To date, the Joint Venture's focus on waterfowl and wetland conservation has not been at the exclusion of other wetland-associated migratory birds. Though lacking a comprehensive plan, partners have designed and implemented projects that contribute to the Joint Venture's objectives and specifically provide benefits to other migratory birds, especially shorebirds. The Joint Venture encourages and supports the emerging bird conservation initiatives, because they will be catalysts for greater interest and effort to conserve wetlands and associated ecosystems.

The Joint Venture is ready, willing, and able to coordinate with new partners who will contribute toward a greater vision of regional habitat conservation for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Partners will continue to exercise the flexibility needed to respond to resource issues, and they will look for opportunities to expand the partnership base and to foster the coordination of biologically based, integrated-bird-conservation activities.

Greg Esslinger, Joint Venture Coordinator

The Intermountain West Joint Venture

Jean Hollingsworth for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Wetlands are vital links for the majority of wildlife in all habitats throughout the Intermountain West area. (Ruddy duck pictured.)

The *1998 Update to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Expanding the Vision* calls for Plan partners to adopt a landscape approach to habitat conservation based upon a sound biological foundation and to expand representation in partnerships. The Intermountain West Joint Venture Management Board has responded to the challenge by expanding its mission to include conservation of *all* migratory birds in *all* habitats within the Joint Venture's boundaries.

An expanded mission does not mean that the Joint Venture is abandoning its waterfowl and wetland conservation goals. Wetlands are vital links for the majority of wildlife in all habitats throughout the Intermountain West area. The Joint Venture's conservation perspective has grown into one that is at a landscape level, protecting diverse habitats within broad, contiguous geographic systems.

An ad hoc *Advisory Council comprised of representatives from each of the bird groups has been established to work with the Joint Venture's coordinator.*

Joint Venture partnerships will be broadened to include representatives of the three other major bird initiatives: U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, Partners in Flight, and North American Colonial Waterbird Plan. Integrating the goals of these initiatives with waterfowl goals will be the Joint Venture's first step toward manifesting its new mission.

An *ad hoc* Advisory Council comprised of representatives from each of the bird groups has been established to work with the Joint Venture's coordinator in making recommendations to the Management Board regarding the reconfiguration of organizational structures and geographical boundaries. Initial recommendations from the Advisory Council include the following:

- The role of the Joint Venture should remain primarily that of implementing projects, and the Management Board's role should remain focused on gaining political and financial support for Joint Venture actions.
- State steering committees need to broaden their representation, and their role should be to support local partnership development and project implementation.
- Based on local and state partnership requirements, focus areas should be enlarged to include watersheds, ecosystems, or physiographic regions within each state, and these new, enlarged units should be renamed "bird conservation areas."
- Joint Venture Technical Committee representation needs to be expanded to reflect a balance among the four bird initiatives, and evaluation and monitoring efforts should begin with the development of a shared database; and
- Joint Venture and bird conservation area implementation plan revisions should become summary documents that capture the common vision of the four initiatives.

Reconfiguring the Joint Venture will require a significant effort by partners old and new, but we believe that it will lead to greater gains for migratory bird conservation, greater than we have ever seen before in the Intermountain West.

Jim Cole, Joint Venture Coordinator

The Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture

Bill Uihlein, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture partners are creating a biological "safety net" of publicly and privately owned habitats for birds living in or passing through this remarkable place. (Northern cardinal pictured).

The Lower Mississippi Valley (LMV) is a valuable wetland resource critical to migratory birds. The 1986 *North American Waterfowl Management Plan* recognized the role of the Nation's largest floodplain in conserving continental waterfowl populations by naming the LMV as one of seven priority conservation areas in the United States. Its value to neotropical forest-breeding birds and migratory shorebirds returning from Central and South American wintering grounds also give the LMV trans-continental significance.

Nearly 75 percent of the LMV's historic forest cover and 90 percent of its historic floodplain have been lost. However, significant opportunities exist to restore the landscape, and the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture has worked assiduously to reverse the losses. Using the best available knowledge of population/habitat interrelationships, the Joint Venture has established ecosystem-wide habitat objectives for each of the three species groups targeted by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Partners in Flight, and the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan.

Neotropical-migrant birds such as the cerulean warbler, wood thrush and swallow-tailed kite have suffered marked population declines as LMV forests have become more fragmented. To focus reforestation efforts for the benefit of these and other area-sensitive species, forest bird conservation regions have been delineated throughout the Joint Venture area. The goal for each region is to support stable breeding populations of a suite of bird species that require a contiguous forest block of similar size.

The Joint Venture has established ecosystem-wide habitat objectives for each of the three species groups.

Using Geographic Information System technologies, each area has been analyzed to determine current forest-block size and configuration, reforestation needs, landownership, and other conservation parameters. Further work is needed to identify potential partners and the right mix of programs and incentives to assist private, state, and federal landowners in meeting the habitat requirements of targeted species.

Ecosystem objectives are being apportioned among state and federal management areas and the private sector, providing a link between on-the-ground management and continental population goals.

Dedicated to restoring the LMV to at least a portion of its historic state, Joint Venture partners have contributed more than $140 million to protect, restore, or enhance over 655,000 acres of habitat, creating a biological "safety net" of publicly and privately owned habitats for birds living in or passing through this remarkable place.

Charles Baxter, Joint Venture Coordinator
Bill Uihlein, Assistant Joint Venture Coordinator

The Pacific Coast Joint Venture

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Pacific Coast Joint Venture sponsored research in Oregon estuaries that assessed their restoration potential for anadromous fish habitat.

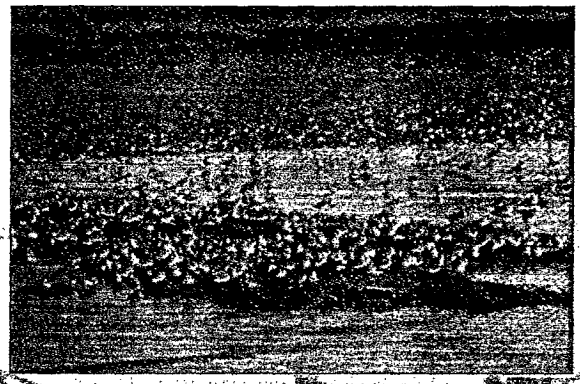
The three visions of the 1998 update to the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan* validate the course the Pacific Coast Joint Venture has taken since its formation in 1991. Created as a wetlands conservation program it has always provided benefits for many species and has attempted to take an ecosystem approach to conservation. The Management Board includes members from conservation organizations that represent a wide array of wetland-dependent species, including anadromous fish. In addition, the Joint Venture's state and provincial steering committees have been chaired by representatives from the Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, and Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Partners have been working in a number of ways to address the issue of the biological foundation. Research, monitoring and evaluation continues and includes several studies identifying species habitat needs and habitat management techniques. Population studies include Pacific brant monitoring, waterfowl-habitat use modeling in the Fraser River delta, moulting and wintering seaduck surveys along the British Columbia (B.C.) Coast, waterfowl response to habitat restoration efforts along the Columbia River, and research on demographics of herons, grebes, loons, and scoters. Studies designed to improve management of habitats include reed-canary-grass eradication trials, *Spartina* eradication research and potential chemical effects on non-target species, shorebird use of farmlands, and agricultural, wildlife, and economic benefits of planting winter-cover crops on the Skagit, Fraser, and Comox valleys.

During the past 2 years, 12 National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program grants, totaling more than $10 million, have gone to estuarine acquisition and restoration projects in Oregon and Washington. Many of these sites were identified through Joint Venture-funded studies. All of the projects have protected or restored critical anadromous-fish-rearing habitat, and most have significantly benefited salmon populations listed under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

The Joint Venture's strategic plan identifies wetland-resource protection objectives for all wetland-dependent birds and anadromous fish.

The Joint Venture has recognized the importance of collaborating with other migratory bird and anadromous fish interests to leverage habitat conservation funding and to focus conservation efforts. For example, to identify habitat projects that are mutually beneficial to migratory bird and fish resources, the Joint Venture-sponsored research in Oregon estuaries that assessed their restoration potential for anadromous-fish habitat. These data were used for comparison with existing migratory bird data to identify high-priority sites based upon mutual benefits. Baseline habitat information has also been obtained through a landscape study in Washington State's Puget Sound. Geographic Information System (GIS) technology is being used to identify former estuarine areas within several major watersheds. Criteria will assist in the prioritization for restoration.



Canadian Wildlife Service

The protection of Boundary Bay in British Columbia was critical to the survival of millions of migrating shorebirds. In addition to migrating and wintering waterfowl, geese, and raptors.

At a local level, partners are working with many volunteers and local governments on inventories and stewardship initiatives whose goals are sustainable landscapes. In B.C. more effort is being spent in riparian areas; for example, looking at needs of landbirds and working with partners on guidelines for buffer strips within agricultural landscapes. The Joint Venture and Partners In Flight have collaborated on riparian research, developed volunteer monitoring and mapping protocols for wetland and riparian areas, and conducted restoration work at Garry Oak woodlands. It has initiated projects that examine economic implications and benefits to agricultural stewardship projects. The Joint Venture also has provided a guide for legal and real estate communities that describe options and tools for incorporating conservation objectives into their activities.

The Joint Venture's Strategic Plan identifies wetland-resource protection objectives for *all* wetland-dependent birds and anadromous fish. For instance, estuaries are high on the plan's priority list. They provide critical habitat for wintering waterfowl, migrating shorebirds, and nesting colonial waterbirds. They also provide essential rearing areas for anadromous fish. This has ensured the building of broad partnerships.

Joint Venture partners have protected more than 60,000 acres of estuarine habitat from San Francisco Bay to the Skeena River in northern B.C. Significant estuarine acquisitions have been completed in virtually all the habitat areas identified as high priority in draft shorebird plans for the Pacific Northwest and B.C. State and provincial steering committees have nominated several sites for inclusion in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, and partners have cost-shared shorebird habitat research in the Willamette and Fraser Valleys. Joint Venture partners are working with the regional shorebird plans to ensure cooperation, coordination, and integration.

The Joint Venture in Canada is expanding its partnerships with other initiatives, including Partners in Flight, Important Bird Areas, Bird Studies Canada Coastal Waterbird Surveys, and the Georgia Basin Ecosystem Initiative. The Joint Venture also is represented on the management board of the Plan's currently forming Sea Duck Joint Venture. This will ensure that habitat objectives identified by the Sea Duck Joint Venture will have the support of the Pacific Coast Joint Venture.

The 1998 Plan update encourages Joint Venture partners to expand their focus in the areas of project evaluation and landscape conservation and to look further outside the box for nontraditional partners with interest in such areas as flood control, hydroelectric development, and public health. The Pacific Coast Joint Venture is well on its way.

Carey Smith, Joint Venture Coordinator (United States)
Trish Hayes, Joint Venture Coordinator (Canada)

The Prairie Habitat Joint Venture

Ducks Unlimited Canada

The Canadian prairies are one of North America's most significant breeding and staging areas for waterfowl and many other bird species.

The Prairie Habitat Joint Venture has been a leader in conservation in Prairie Canada since the late 1980s, conserving well over a million acres of some of the most productive migratory bird breeding habitat on the continent.

The Joint Venture is embracing the challenge of fulfilling the visions of the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan*'s 1998 update. It has expanded its vision for prairie and parkland landscapes suited to sustaining bird populations in harmony with human use of the environment. With this vision, partners are committed to addressing several strategic priorities.

As part of the Joint Venture's's waterfowl conservation plan, it will address the continuing decline of pintails and scaup, both identified as species of concern in the Plan update.

In addition to building on the strengths of the Joint Venture's waterfowl conservation plan, partners are developing a plan for shorebirds and encouraging the progress of other migratory bird initiatives in Prairie Canada. In support of the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan and the North American Bird Conservation Initiative, the Prairie Shorebird Conservation Plan will detail species knowledge of breeders and migrants in Prairie Canada, constraints on shorebird populations, and research, monitoring, and evaluation strategies. It will identify important habitat types for shorebird conservation on the prairies, habitat securement priorities, and habitat management techniques. The Joint Venture will also explore opportunities for combined habitat conservation programming with other bird initiatives.

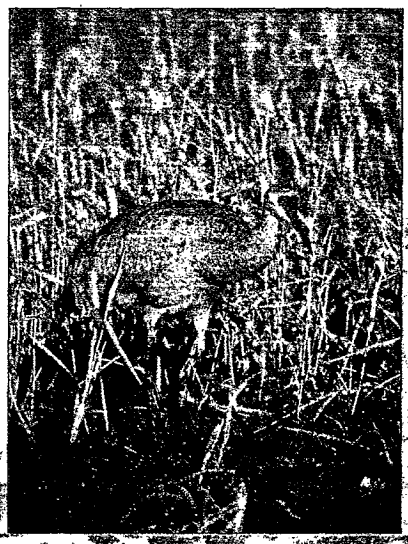
The 1998 update also stresses the importance of understanding landscapes in relation to human use and other influences. The Joint Venture Habitat Monitoring Program is designed to evaluate changes to wildlife habitat and land use within target areas. Partners have concentrated on integrating data from various sources, such as Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, to determine habitat changes that have occurred across the prairie ecozone since the Plan's inception.

Another important issue is researching waterfowl diseases, such as avian botulism. The Joint Venture has established a working group to evaluate potential management options for reducing avian botulism outbreaks on prairie wetlands.

To fully integrate broader bird conservation on the prairie landscape, the practicalities for delivering programs must be determined. The Prairie Habitat and Prairie Pothole Joint Venture are designing a landscape project based on a strong biological foundation for waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, and colonial waterbirds. This initiative will reach out to new partners and provide a template for bird and habitat conservation well into the millennium.

Deanna Knudson, Joint Venture Coordinator

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture



Karen Hollingsworth for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Playa Lakes Joint Venture has protected, restored, or enhanced over 55,000 acres of wetlands and associated uplands to benefit a variety of migratory birds. (Sandhill crane pictured.)

In January 1990, the wildlife agencies of Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas, several federal agencies, conservation organizations, and a corporation jointly signed a memorandum of understanding to become the seventh joint venture to be formed under the auspices of the *North American Waterfowl Management Plan*. With a commitment of funding for a coordinator from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and project seed-money pledged by Phillips Petroleum Company to each of the five partner states, the Joint Venture was off and running.

Focusing on waterfowl and the 25,000 playa basins and saline lakes in the Southern Great Plains, Joint Venture partners have worked with more than 300 private landowners to enhance or restore playas through moist soil management, water management, creation of filter strips and grass buffers around basins, fencing, and grasslands restoration. Through grants and partnerships with state and federal agencies, conservation organizations, corporations, communities, and individuals, the Joint Venture has protected, restored, or enhanced over 55,000 acres of wetlands and associated uplands. Over $26 million of non-federal funds have been contributed to habitat conservation projects.

Joint Venture wetlands acquisition projects created the Playa Lakes Wildlife Management Area in Texas, the Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area in Oklahoma, the Wild Turkey Wildlife Management Area, among others, in Kansas, and the XY Ranch Wildlife Management Area in Colorado. These state-owned areas allow the public to enjoy nature in a landscape that is largely privately owned and altered.

Shorebirds, songbirds, mammals, amphibians, and even large numbers of monarch butterflies use these playas, known as "the heart of biodiversity in a sea of agriculture" . . .

In New Mexico, enhancement and restoration activities have focused on the Texas/New Mexico border near Clovis and adjacent to federal and state wildlife areas in the Gallinas and Pecos watershed. With ownership of over 700,000 acres of National Grasslands, the U.S. Forest Service has restored modified playas to their natural function by filling in pits dug for livestock watering.

These habitat enhancements and restorations benefit more than waterfowl. Shorebirds, songbirds, mammals, amphibians, and even large numbers of monarch butterflies use these playas, known as "the heart of biodiversity in a sea of agriculture" in the Southern Great Plains. Joint Venture partners have expanded their horizons by funding research on shorebirds and the use of playas by amphibians and mammals, as well as exploring land management "best practices" that put wildlife management and agriculture in concert.

With the 1998 Plan update providing the vision and with an interest in landscape-level management in the Playa Lakes/Southern Great Plains Region, the Joint Venture will continue expanding the partnership, adding new communities, businesses, agencies, and organizations. Together, they will continue the work of integrating habitat conservation, natural resource education, and ecotourism with agriculture, water conservation, and jobs. The beneficiaries will be the wildlife and people that depend on this landscape for their well-being.

Kathy Wood, Joint Venture Coordinator

The Prairie Pothole Joint Venture

Unknown

The Prairie Pothole Joint Venture works cooperatively with landowners to implement habitat protection and management strategies that benefit waterfowl and other wetland and prairie species.

One of the most important waterfowl production regions on the continent, the Prairie Pothole Region generates almost half of North America's ducks, and provides habitat for shorebirds, wading birds, songbirds, amphibians, and a variety of other wildlife.

The Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, organized in 1987, began with a waterfowl focus. Initial planning and implementation focused on habitat protection, restoration and enhancement strategies, meeting waterfowl objectives, and building partnerships between wildlife and agricultural interests. Planning and assessment efforts for waterfowl played—and continue to play—a critical role in guiding Joint Venture implementation and in relating habitat goals to specific population responses on the landscape.

"There is widespread support for being the delivery mechanism for all-bird conservation. . .and for not losing our identity and commitment to waterfowl."

Ralph Morgenweck
Chair, Prairie Pothole Joint Venture

By 1994, Joint Venture partners recognized that other wildlife concerns, specifically for wetland/grassland migratory birds and threatened and endangered species, such as the piping plover, could be addressed through partnerships with organizations such as Wetlands for the Americas and Partners In Flight. Partners developed biogeographical profiles of shorebirds that migrate through and breed in the Joint Venture area and identified the habitat requirements for wetland/grassland birds.

They also worked to influence the direction of broad-based agricultural policy initiatives like the Conservation Reserve Program. Together, they protect large tracts of grasslands and wetlands, restore or create wetlands/grasslands, and enhance wetland/grassland productivity for wildlife on private lands through proper management.

Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the Joint Venture's partners are

- expanding their knowledge of how prairie landscapes affect waterfowl recruitment,
- incorporating a landscape approach for all migratory birds,
- creating a Prairie Pothole Region database to facilitate resource analysis,
- improving strategic planning tools and distribution of technical information to land managers,
- increasing coordination with Canada and Mexico for an integrated continental perspective,
- identifying critical habitat characteristics for non-waterfowl birds,
- increasing funding for all aspects of Joint Venture implementation,
- identifying new and non-traditional partners, and
- ensuring that changing agricultural policies support Joint Venture goals.

Partners are using new technologies for strategic planning and evaluation, coupling years of waterfowl data with landscape features to predict waterfowl nest success. New criteria to model habitat requirements of shorebirds and grassland birds are being developed to add to the data layers. Through use of maps and models, using data on land cover, land ownership, preferred habitat for breeding birds, and new land protection strategies, partners are targeting their activities and determining which management practices are most effective and cost-efficient.

Helping shape the future of the prairie landscape to benefit wildlife and agriculture is a continuing challenge. Partners recognize that protecting healthy landscapes is key to conserving all birds. Partners will continue to work cooperatively with landowners to implement habitat protection and management strategies that bring the Joint Venture closer to its goal of integrating North American migratory bird conservation.

Carol Lively, Joint Venture Coordinator

The Rainwater Basin Joint Venture

Steve Moran

A Rainwater Basin Joint Venture interagency/interdisciplinary Bird Engineering Team meets on-site to provide information, technical assistance, and project coordination to the landowner.

The *North American Waterfowl Management Plan*'s Rainwater Basin Joint Venture covers only 17 counties in southeastern Nebraska. Small though it may be in size, the Joint Venture has risen to the challenges put forth in the 1998 Plan update. The Plan and the Joint Venture serve as international and local initiative models for resource conservation through partnerships, and they both continuously evolve to meet changing opportunities and challenges.

To manifest the visions of the 1998 Plan update, the Joint Venture has initiated the development of an evaluation plan. The plan will not only guide efforts to better define the biological foundation of the Joint Venture, but the exercise will serve as a catalyst for resource management partners to take a fresh look at how they "do their business." The Adaptive Resource Management approach will bring partners together to monitor wetland habitat management activities and use the results of their actions to improve future decisions.

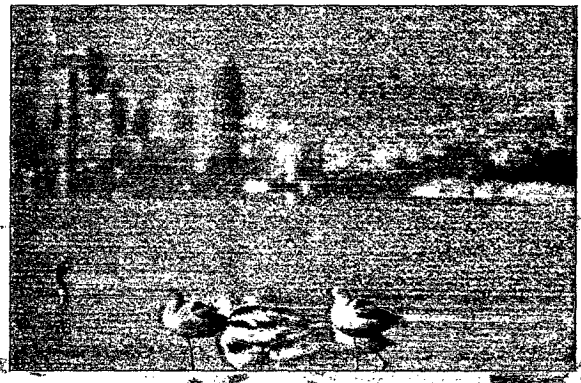
Addressing wetland restoration and management in a holistic manner requires a thorough knowledge of the resources within the Rainwater Basin landscape.

Addressing wetland restoration and management in a holistic manner requires a thorough knowledge of the resources within the Rainwater Basin landscape. The Joint Venture is developing a comprehensive resource inventory in a Geological Information System (GIS) format that will significantly improve the availability of information to land management decision-makers. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and University of Nebraska are developing a GIS product which, when combined with existing GIS data, will place an extensive library of spatial information at partners' fingertips.

The Joint Venture's Management Board is a core partnership of resource agencies and landowners who guide our efforts in wetland habitat restoration and management. Joint Venture efforts have always been project based, allowing the mix of participants in project partnerships to match the opportunities offered and the benefits generated. Having open partnerships creates opportunities for other bird conservation groups, agricultural interests, corporations, and local governments to participate when and where their interests intersect.

Steve Moran, Joint Venture Coordinator

The San Francisco Bay Joint Venture



Mark Rauzon

Its urban setting means that the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture Management Board faces a different set of challenges than those typically found in other joint venture areas.

A couple of things make the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture unique within the family of *North American Waterfowl Management Plan* joint ventures. It is the youngest—its Implementation Plan being approved by the Plan Committee in 1999. It is also the smallest of the joint ventures, its boundaries circumscribing a major metropolitan area that surrounds a major body of water, which is associated with habitat critical to migratory and resident wildlife.

Its urban setting means that the Joint Venture's Management Board faces a different set of challenges than those typically found in other joint venture areas, but it is prepared to face them head-on. *Restoring the Estuary: an Implementation Strategy for the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture* is the Management Board's concept plan for renewing the region's wetlands and creeks. It applies a landscape perspective to habitat conservation and seeks to integrate wildlife needs with those of public health and safety.

The Implementation Strategy establishes region-wide habitat goals and sub-regional acreage objectives, defined in terms of three broad categories of wetland habitats: bay wetlands, seasonal wetlands, and creek and lake habitats. Over the next two decades, partners plan to protect 63,000 acres, restore 37,000 acres, and enhance another 35,000 acres of the Bay's tidal flats, marshes, and lagoons. They will also protect adjoining seasonal wetlands, which include moist grasslands and diked wetlands, with protection and restoration goals of 37,000 and 30,000 acres, respectively. In addition, they will restore and enhance over 1,000 miles (about 20,000 acres) of creeks.

Over the next two decades, partners plan to protect 63,000 acres, restore 37,000 acres, and enhance another 36,000 acres of the Bay's habitats.

The foundation of and primary framework for these habitat goals is the *San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Project*. This document is a visionary, partnership-oriented, ecosystem-management plan for the restoration of the Bay estuary. The plan was the fruit of a 4-year collaboration of over 100 scientists and resource managers from many organizations and disciplines and includes a Geographic Information System based "Eco-atlas" of the current and original extent of the region's wetlands.

While status as a Plan joint venture was approved only recently, no time has been wasted in getting projects on-the-ground. Since signing a cooperative working agreement in 1995, the Management Board, comprised of 25 members reflecting a variety of interests in the Bay area, has completed 22 wetland protection, restoration, or enhancement projects involving almost 14,000 acres, with 16,200 acres in progress.

Though it may be the newest of the joint ventures, its goals are in sync with those of the recently updated Plan. To be successful in returning wetlands to the Bay area, the Joint Venture has developed a strong biological foundation, taken a landscape approach to habitat conservation, and has built a partnership that includes the many diverse interests associated with the wetlands of San Francisco Bay.

John Steere, Joint Venture Coordinator

The Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture

Karen Hollingsworth for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The Upper Mississippi River Great Lakes Region Joint Venture Management Board added a nongame wildlife objective to its waterfowl habitat and population objectives. (Great blue heron pictured.)

Is integrated bird conservation, that is, "all birds in all habitats," the wave of the future? Absolutely! And the partners of the Upper Mississippi River and Great Lakes Region Joint Venture agree. Many recent developments have solidified this commitment in the Joint Venture and support the visions of the *1998 Update to the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Expanding the Vision*.

In 1997, the boundaries of the Joint Venture expanded to include mid-latitude migration habitats important to waterfowl, especially the big river habitats of the lower Missouri, the Ohio, and the Illinois river valleys. These mid-continent habitats were omitted during early phases of the Plan, but are critical for providing feeding and resting areas between the northern nesting grounds and the wintering grounds of the lower Mississippi River valley, the Gulf Coast, and Latin America.

Shortly thereafter, the Management Board added a nongame wildlife objective to its waterfowl habitat and population objectives in the *1998 Update to the Joint Venture Implementation Plan*, with specific emphasis on "declining non-waterfowl migratory birds." Instead of just incidentally benefitting nongame wildlife, the Management Board wanted to take a more proactive approach to increasing non-waterfowl bird populations. The new objective dovetails well with the pending completion of the Partners In Flight Bird Conservation Plans, the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan, and the North American Colonial Waterbird Conservation Plan .

Instead of just incidentally benefitting nongame wildlife, our Board wanted to take a more proactive approach to increasing non-waterfowl bird populations.

That was just the beginning! Integrated bird conservation in a joint venture requires implementing all of the visions of the 1998 North American Waterfowl Management Plan update. To **strengthen the Joint Venture's biological foundation**, we are initiating several evaluation studies to see 1) how the northern nesting habitats east of the Prairie Pothole Region contribute to waterfowl recruitment; 2) how nongame birds benefit from wetland restoration projects designed for waterfowl; and 3) what the mid-latitude habitats need to provide migrating waterfowl in terms of high energy food types and duration.

As we work toward "all birds in all habitats" and reach out to non-waterfowl conservationists and nongame-bird experts to help plan habitat projects, we are **broadening the scope of our partnerships**. The Wisconsin Steering Committee is the Joint Venture's first statewide group to officially initiate meetings and draft a concept plan for integrated bird conservation. Other state steering committees plan to follow suit.

Lastly, we intend to blend technology, such as Geographic Information Systems, with the above strategies to move state and Joint Venture objectives into a **landscape conservation** context, so that the efforts of all Plan partners work in synchrony. The Joint Venture's momentum and expertise has already been used to help establish national wildlife refuges, to maximize the effectiveness of North American Wetlands Conservation Act grant dollars, and to advise U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ecosystem teams on projects and priorities.

Like we said, it's just the beginning!

Jim Leach, Joint Venture Coordinator
Barbara Pardo, Assistant Joint Venture Coordinator

North American Waterfowl Management Plan
Habitat Joint Venture Areas

1 Atlantic Coast
2 Central Valley Habitat
3 Eastern Habitat
4 Gulf Coast
5 Intermountain West
6 Lower Mississippi Valley
7 Pacific Coast
8 Prairie Habitat
9 Playa Lakes
10 Prairie Pothole
11 Rainwater Basin
12 San Francisco Bay
13 Upper Mississippi River-Great Lakes Region

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